

Applic. No. 10/089,705

Amdt. dated February 23, 2004

Reply to Office action of October 21, 2003

Claim Amendments

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Claim 1 (currently-amended). An apparatus for transferring membranes to a continuously operable sealing carrousel for the heat sealing of can-like packaging materials, comprising a rotatable transfer station being ~~arranged~~ disposed upstream of the sealing carrousel, the transfer station ~~is being~~ constructed as a cyclically drivable membrane star, and a cutting tool for membrane-strip processing ~~is provided being~~ disposed above the membrane star, ~~it being possible for effecting~~ transfer of cut-out membranes from the membrane strip to the membrane star ~~to be effected~~ during the resting phases of the membrane star and for effecting advancement of membranes positioned on the membrane star to the sealing carrousel ~~to be effected~~ during the movement phases of the membrane star.

Claim 2 (currently-amended): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a number of vacuum stations ~~formed~~ disposed on the membrane star.

Claim 3 (previously-presented): The apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein the individual vacuum stations on the membrane star are constructed such that, where the membranes are transferred to/received by the respective sealing head,

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the stations can be returned via an entry curve.

Claim 4 (currently-amended): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the membrane-strip feed to the cutting tool is ~~provided~~ disposed laterally above the membrane star.

Claim 5 (currently-amended): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the membrane-strip feed to the cutting tool is ~~provided~~ disposed at a feed angle of approximately 30 degrees.

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Claim 6 (previously-presented): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein during each resting phase of the membrane star, in each case two membranes can be transferred from the membrane strip, by way of a double cutting tool, to the membrane star.

Claim 7 (previously-presented): The apparatus as claimed in claim 6, further comprising ejectors for the cut-out membranes integrated in each case in the cutting punches of the double cutting tool.

Claim 8 (previously-presented): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a vacuum station in the form of a collector/ejector integrated within each sealing head on the sealing carrousel.

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Claim 9 (previously-presented): The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the membrane star is constructed such that it can be driven by a step-by-step motion linkage.

Claim 10 (new): A method for transferring membranes to a continuously operable sealing carrousel for heat sealing of can-like packaging materials, the method which comprises:

placing a rotatable transfer station constructed as a cyclically drivable membrane star upstream of the sealing carrousel;

placing a cutting tool above the membrane star and cutting membranes from membrane-strip with the cutting tool;

transferring cut-out membranes from the membrane strip to the membrane star during resting phases of the membrane star; and

advancing the cut-out membranes to the sealing carrousel during movement phases of the membrane star.

Claim 11 (new): The method according to claim 10, which further comprises disposing a number of vacuum stations on the membrane star.